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Family: A Resource Reading Guide

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FAMILY A READING RESOURCE GUIDE

BY ELEANOR DANIEL

Introduction

Of the making of books there is no end. That is especially true when you try to sort through the plethora of books about family and family issues published in the last twenty years. Everyone is concerned about the family. Politicians talk about family values. Churches deplore the situation. Gurus propose answers—some of which may not be theologically accurate or practically helpful. Congregational leaders are left to sort out what is plausible. Sometimes it can make your head whirl just to try to figure out which books are of real value for your ministry, especially in the midst of so many competing voices and messages on what it means to be family and to have family values.

This resource guide attempts to identify some of the most valuable of the many resources available. With but an exception or two, it includes only books published since 1990. That is not because good resources were unavailable before then, but

because so many books have been published in the last ten years. Most of these writings utilize advances in biblical and social research—so necessary for us to carefully assess our own ministries.

Books That Examine Family Issues in Bible Times

One important category is that of books based on solid biblical and theological research. An excellent series entitled *The Family, Religion, and Culture* has been developed by Westminster/John Knox Press in Louisville. The series, edited by Don S. Browning and Ian S. Evison, is made up of ten books. Two in particular examine families in the ancient world: *Families in Ancient Israel*, edited by Leo G. Perdue, Joseph Blenkinsopp, John J. Collins, and Carol Myers; and *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches*, by Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch. The latter is reviewed in the book review section of this issue of *Leaven*.

Both books are essential reading for understanding biblical material related to family.

Another resource is *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor* (New York: Routledge, 1997), edited by Halvor Moxnes. Jorge Maldonado published another interesting book that looks at family issues in the Bible: *Even in the Best of Families: The Family of Jesus and Other Biblical Families like Ours* (Geneva: WCC Press, 1994). You may also find Stephen C. Barton's *The Family in Theological Perspective* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996) and his *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994) worth reading.

Collections of Essays on Contemporary Family Issues

The Family, Religion, and Culture series, mentioned above, contains several additional titles of value in understanding families. Eight books complete the series. *The Family Handbook*,

edited by Herbert Anderson, Don Browning, Ian S. Evison, and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, is a book I used in teaching a D.Min. class. It contains sections on contemporary perspectives on family, special situations of family ministry, resources for congregations, and families in history. Each of the chapters contains three essays, from Jewish, Catholic, and evangelical perspectives. This is a strength of the book, although it creates some unevenness in the chapters. Other titles in this series are *From Culture Wars to Common Ground: Religion and the American Family Debate*; *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition*; *Covenant and Commitments: Faith, Family, and Economic Life*; *For the Love of Children: Genetic Technology and the Future of the Family*; *Faith Traditions and the Family*; *Tending the Flock: Congregations and Family Ministry*; and *Religion, Feminism, and the Family*. Each deals with obviously important issues in contemporary church and society.

When Jack and Judith Balswick write about family, the work is worth reading. The Balswicks teach at Fuller Theological Seminary and have written prolifically about families and family issues. Their newest book is entitled *Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999). A revision of a book they had written ten years earlier, it is a helpful, insightful book on family processes and dynamics. Another of their new books is *Authentic Human Sexuality: An Integrated Christian Approach* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1999), which is reviewed in the

book review section of this issue. Still another excellent book from the Balswicks is *Raging Hormones* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), a helpful resource for parents. The subtitle explains the content best: *What to Do When You Suspect Your Teen May Be Sexually Active*. Both Balswicks also wrote *Families in Pain: Working Through the Hurts* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1997), which looks at the challenges of family life and gives specific help for families dealing with addiction, divorce, suicide, childlessness, and traumatic loss from violence. It also provides insight into helping families deal with the grief attendant to those losses.

Jack Balswick also wrote *Men at the Crossroads: Beyond Traditional Roles and Modern Options* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1992). Judith Balswick teamed up with Boni Piper to write *Then They Leave Home: Parenting after the Kids Grow Up* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997), a helpful guide for empty nesters.

A compassionate pastoral resource for Christian leaders who work with those about to divorce or newly divorced is Bruce Parmenter's *Christians Caught in the Divorce Trap* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1995). It is a book by a minister for ministers: Parmenter has long pastoral experience in Stone-Campbell churches, on the faculty of Lincoln Christian Seminary and Friends University, and in pastoral counseling practice. A particularly helpful chapter is the next-to-last one, entitled "Preventing Divorce in the Church." It contains a message of grace and healing. An expanded review is included in this issue's book review section.

Another pastoral care book worth reading is *Pastoral Care with Children* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), by Andrew D. Lester. It has been around for a while, but it is a helpful resource in dealing with families. Another resource with useful insight for pastoral care to families is *Ministry with Youth in Crisis* (Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1997), by Harley Atkinson. Particularly helpful material is presented in the chapters dealing with sexuality, addictive behavior, and suicide.

The pastoral caregiver may also want to look into a couple of books designed for providing help to families in specific situations. One of them, *Sunrise Tomorrow* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1988), is written by Elizabeth Brown, a committed Christian who lives in my city. She shares her journey of dealing with the death of her young daughter. A similar kind of book is *Down Is Up for Aaron: A Mother's Spiritual Journey with Down Syndrome* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1993), by Vicki Noble. Resources of this kind are extremely valuable for families struggling with the same or similar issues.

Every minister and Christian educator should be familiar with the ongoing research of the Search Institute in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This group has produced excellent research among children and teenagers for many years now. The array of literature available from them is impressive. Their massive research has uncovered forty of what they call developmental assets. They have discovered that if teenagers experience thirty or more of these assets, they will almost certainly

be launched into productive young adulthood. Peter C. Scales and Nancy Leffert have pulled the research together into a book entitled *Developmental Assets: A Synthesis of the Scientific Research on Adolescent Development* (Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1999). Search publications include other resources such as *Creating Intergenerational Community* (1996), by Jolene L. Roehlkepartain; and *Growing Up Adopted* (1994), by Peter Benson. Visit the Search Institute at <http://www.search-institute.org>. Their address is 700 South Third, Suite 210, Minneapolis, MN 55415-1138.

Family Ministry Guides

The congregational leader should be aware of several excellent books designed to help shape a family ministry in the local church. The first is *Family Ministry: A Comprehensive Guide* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1999), by Diana Garland. She has written extensively about family issues and family education. This, in my opinion, is the best of the resources I will mention in this section. See the extended review in the book review section.

A second extremely valuable tool is *Family Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), by Charles Sell. Sell, a Christian education faculty person at Trinity Evangelical Divinity

School, first wrote a book of this title in 1981. This volume is an update of his original material. See the book review section for a lengthier review.

Two additional resources, both of which contain some helpful essays and information, are *Handbook of Family Life Education* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), by Kenneth O. Gangel and James C. Wilhoit; and *Handbook of Family Religious Education* (Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1994), edited by Blake J. Neff and Donald Ratcliff. The latter contains a chapter by the Balswicks, as well as material from other authorities in the field.

An additional resource is *Family-Based Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1994), by Mark DeVries. It represents an attempt to bring youth ministry into the midst of the community of faith rather than allowing it to exist as a parallel ministry to congregational and family life.

Journals

As helpful as books sometimes are, good journals keep the reader up-to-date with developments in the fields they represent. Three are especially noteworthy. *Assets* is a publication of the Search Institute that provides updates on their research and the application of the *Assets* literature in congregations and communities. The American Association of

Christian Counselors produces *Marriage and Family: A Christian Journal*. It includes sections for pastors, researchers, and clinicians. My personal pick of the journals, however, is *Family Ministry: Empowering Through Faith*. Produced from Louisville Theological Seminary and edited by Diana Garland and John Mulder, it usually contains three or four feature articles, a snapshots section that presents what selected congregations are doing in family ministry, and a review of resources applicable to family ministry.

Conclusion

Family is the hot issue in politics, society, and the church. This is evident when one examines the literature produced within the last decade. And it has generally been so, I discovered as I ran through bibliographical entries in our seminary library. Perhaps this article will help to point to some of the literature that would be most helpful in your ministry. Oh, yes—let me mention one more book: *Alexander Campbell and the Family* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1988), by Ralph Edward Groover. Anyone in the Restoration movement should find that interesting!

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